

# HOMILY / SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT – YEAR B

Based on St. Mark 8: 31-38 | By Rt Rev'd Dr Geoffrey S Robinson CJ



May I speak in the Name of God, who is  
+Father, Son and Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

In today's gospel reading, the first lesson which Jesus tries to teach us, is that we must deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Him. This example is definitely not a popular teaching in our world today! It probably never has been. It won't win us promotion at work. It won't make us famous, and moreover, we probably won't hear it anywhere else, except in church!

If you care to go on the internet and search for websites or YouTube videos that teach us how to deny ourselves - about all we'll find is this particular teaching from Jesus, which we listened to a moment ago from Saint Mark's Gospel.

So, what is Jesus talking about here? I think he simply means that there are times when we must say "no" to ourselves in order to say "yes" to God. It really is that simple, and I suggest that maybe we all may even do that today; simply by listening to this homily.

If you occasionally become tired of worshiping in this way – I know that I sometimes do! – but, perseverance and attendance at mass; is in fact one way of beginning to deny ourselves, at least on a small scale. Perhaps that is something of what Jesus is talking about. Because,

sometimes we must say no to ourselves, in order to say yes to God.

On a deeper level, maybe Jesus is also saying that we must deny our false selves in order to truly be the person God created us to be. That false self is the self that is governed by the world's standards. It is the self that equates success with happiness. The self that believes that the one who dies with the most possessions wins. The self that thinks that possessions and things like more money, more power, more pleasure are what will bring us more peace.

This of course is all our false self, and only when we deny it can we become our true self, the person that God has created us to be. We don't have to be anything different from who we truly are. But we will never discover and accept who we truly are, until we deny the false self that we all have. That is the first step to following Jesus.

*"If anyone wants to become my followers," Jesus says, "let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."*

Thinking about that then and trying to live a selfless life in Christ, brought to mind a short story about a man named Sam. Sam was well-known for being a very selfish and greedy man, who always thought about himself first, and how he could cheat money from anyone that he could.

All he was really concerned about was to get lots and lots of money without giving any thought to his dishonesty in obtaining it. He was a thoroughly disreputable man who

was never interested in sharing anything he had with other people. But then one day, he lost a small bag which contained many gold coins.

He began searching in all the possible places where he thought he might have left it, but without any success. So, Sam's only friend and neighbour joined in searching for the bag of coins, but all their hard work was in vain.

Then, unexpectedly after several days, the ten-year-old daughter of Sam's neighbour found a bag which looked like the one which Sam had lost. So she immediately told her father and they returned the bag to Sam the owner.

Unfortunately, Sam was such a greedy man and still wanted to play a dishonest game. So looking into the bag he began to shout at his neighbour that some coins were missing. You have stolen some of the coins. Greedy Sam refused to listen to his neighbour who of course pleaded his innocence.

Sam hearing his neighbour's denial, decided to take the matter to court where the judge would hear all the details from both sides. In due time, the Judge questioned Sam, the neighbour, and even his ten-year-old daughter who had originally found the bag of coins.

The judge who also knew that Sam was a greedy man, asked him how many coins the bag contained; Sam was adamant and told him that there were 75 coins, but only 60 coins had been returned to him. It is obvious, Sam said, the other 15 coins must have been stolen by my neighbour.

Hearing this, the judge asked Sam again, “are you sure your bag had 75 coins?” Sam nodded vigorously. So, the judge thought for a while and then made his decision.

“Since you lost a bag of 75 coins, but the bag which was found by your neighbour’s daughter only contained 60 coins, it is clear that this bag doesn’t belong to you. However, if anyone does find a bag containing 75 coins, I will reconsider the case and rule that your bag is returned to you immediately.

So, as no complaint has ever been received regarding a bag containing 60 coins; I order the father and daughter to take those 60 coins as a reward and appreciation of their honesty!” -

If there is one thing that I have learned in my life, it is that not all crosses we take up are voluntary ones. Sometimes a cross is placed on our shoulders that we did not ask for. A positive COVID test or any unsettling health diagnosis, the death of a loved one, the loss of a job – these really are crosses that we don’t ask for. But when we accept them, and trust God to be with us through them, then we are taking them up as crosses. They are not God’s punishment towards us – but once we can accept them, we will begin to see God at work in and through them.

Another thing that I have become convinced about, is that the cross which we are asked to take up by Jesus changes over our lifetime. The cross that we are asked to take up as a young person is a very different one from the cross that we are asked to take up as an older person.

As a young person, our cross might mean standing up for what we believe, even when it's unpopular to do so. It might mean saying no to friends, even when it threatens our friendships.

In marriage, there are new crosses, including those times when we are called to put your spouse's needs and interests before our own. If we are blessed with children, there are new crosses like caring about our child so much that it hurts when they are hurting. Then as we continue into old age, new crosses present themselves. Giving up independence, as we perhaps are no longer able to drive. Learning to humble ourselves and rely on others for help.

Of course, these crosses are not always voluntary, but are part of what it means to follow Jesus. Accepting them gracefully, and humbly, and courageously is certainly close to the one which Our Lord accepted for each one of us.

Don't let us forget that short tale of Sam: Sam, Sam, the greedy old man! He was selfish, dishonest and greedy in the extreme. We on the other hand should strive to accept the Holy Cross, trust Jesus, and follow Him.

Once we begin doing this, we will be telling the world much more about what the Gospel passage had to say to us today.

I believe that actions do speak louder than words – how about you? **Amen.**